

Interpreting a visual text: Identifying purpose, audience, and strategies

Prepare and bring two writings for our next class:

FIRST: AN INITIAL INTERPRETATION (From Assignment 3.1)

The second essay for this course is a rhetorical analysis. You won't do a formally written rhetorical analysis—yet; this assignment will help you to prepare for writing a formal rhetorical analysis.

To do this, first re-articulate (revise and/or reprint what you wrote for the “Initial Interpretation” for 3.1) what you think Barry's purpose might be. What do you think she is hoping her readers will think, feel, be aware of, or do as they read the essay and then afterwards? Who do you think her audience might be? (Keep in mind that Barry might not have had you, or someone like you, in mind as she wrote “Common Scents”!) What sorts of values and concerns does her writing show her to believe her readers hold? What questions about life do you think she believes her readers ask? What type of knowledge, beliefs, or worldviews does Barry assume to be part of the context of her essay?

SECOND: TESTING YOUR INITIAL INTERPRETATION / INTERPRETATIVE QUESTIONS

After you have articulated a purpose—something about moving an audience with some particular set of values, beliefs, and concerns to consider something they might not have otherwise—go through the essay carefully looking for places where you can see Barry making specific strategic composing choices to move her readers in that way. For example, how does your articulation of her purpose help you explain the manner in which she starts the essay, by looking back in past tense voice? Why does she talk about smells, like air fresheners and pigs blood stew? Why does she include narrative, dialogue, and labels? Why does she draw the characters the way she does? How *does* she draw the characters? Why does she have the tone of voice she does (and just how would you describe her tone of voice)? Why does she include the scenes that she does? Why does she place the visual collection of smelly items near the end? Anything you can see in the essay as a choice—individual words, the speed of a sentence, why one paragraph or frame comes before another—ought to be something you can explain in terms of the purpose you've identified. See if you can explain everything to yourself!

Once you've tried your own explanation of the whole essay (which is challenging but not impossible), choose the four or five strategies you think most support Barry in achieving her purpose. Write several paragraphs in which you describe what you think Barry's purpose to be, and how the strategies you've identified support Barry in moving her readers to do the thinking, feeling, acting, or reconsidering you believe is her purpose.

In your writing, include whatever evidence you need from “Common Scents”—quotations, paraphrases, summaries—to support your beliefs. Also, feel free to draw on class discussions and the writings of others in class to support your claims.